

Through the Dark Tonight by ThrillingDetectiveTales

Category: Stranger Things (TV 2016)

Genre: Alternate Universe - Canon Divergence, Child Abuse, Gen, Hurt/Comfort, Neil Hargrove is His Own Warning, Serious Injuries

Language: English

Characters: Billy Hargrove, Steve Harrington

Relationships: Billy Hargrove & Steve Harrington, Pre-Billy Hargrove/Steve Harrington - Relationship

Status: Completed

Published: 2021-05-22

Updated: 2021-05-22

Packaged: 2022-03-31 22:14:00

Rating: Mature

Warnings: No Archive Warnings Apply

Chapters: 1

Words: 2,928

Publisher: archiveofourown.org

Summary:

“I’m gonna fucking die out here,” Billy chuckled into the night, cheeks aching with the force of his grin. He threw his head back and hollered, “In Hawkins fucking Indiana!” so loud that a couple of birds took off from the nearby trees.

He laughed and laughed and toppled backwards against the Camaro’s hood despite the white hot rush of pain that roared through his arm, his head, his ribs. He thought he might be crying, too. His eyes stung and the world had dissolved into blurry smears of color all around him, but he couldn’t stop. He was wheezing with it. Positively howling, it was so goddamn funny.

Hawkins fucking Indiana. Christ.

Through the Dark Tonight

Author's Note:

So, I wrote this for H/C Bingo's May Amnesty challenge, completely forgetting that one of the requirements was that your fill had to be for a small fandom. Since I finished it before I remembered that bit, I figured I'd share it anyway.

The prompts I was writing for were "broken bones, touch-starved, & homesickness." It's my first time trying my hand at these particular characters, so let me know what you think!

Also, this hasn't been beta-read, but I hope you enjoy it anyway.

Title from The Rural Alberta Advantage's, "Brother."

TW for the aftermath and slight mention of some pretty severe child abuse.

March 8, 1985

The water at the bottom of the quarry looked black in the moonlight, as dark as the bruise slowly seeping beneath the swollen skin halfway up Billy Hargrove's left forearm. He had the offending limb tucked in tight against his side, shoulder held so stiffly it ached in an attempt to keep everything from jostling too much whenever he took a breath. It was broken, no question, but Billy wasn't quite ready to deal with that yet.

His ears were still ringing from when Neil had slammed his head back against the refrigerator and the blooming tang of copper was thick at the back of his throat. Maybe just the usual run-off from his busted nose, or maybe a symptom of something worse. He leaned over—taking care to move as little as possible—and spat over the

hood of the Camaro. He couldn't tell if the dark blotch that splattered out onto the dirt was blood, saliva, or a mix of the two, but he didn't really care. He would heal, or he wouldn't, and there was very little he could do to tip the scales either way, out here all by himself in the scrubby woods that surrounded Hawkins proper, going on eleven o'clock at night.

He probably should have driven himself to the hospital, but he hadn't been thinking clearly since he went ass over teakettle down the stairs to the back door and landed with a sharp snap on top of his arm on the lawn. Neil had been looming over him in the doorway, face red and eyes bulging while he heaved another furious breath. Billy had sacrificed whatever remaining dignity he might have had in favor of beating a hasty retreat while his body was still numb from the adrenaline pounding through his veins.

It had been a minor miracle that he had his keys in his pocket. He usually left them in the little decorative trinket dish Susan kept on the table in the entryway, per Neil's orders, but he'd been in a hurry, ready to take off as soon as their farce of a family dinner was complete. He had plans to meet up with Harrington, after. His parents were out of town, like always, and he'd invited Billy over to crack a couple of beers, maybe smoke a joint in that fancy heated pool of his, after Billy'd made one too many pointed comments about how there was shit all to do in Hawkins this early in the spring. It was the first time Harrington had extended an offer to spend time with Billy alone, as if the tentative truce they'd entered into after the mishap on Halloween had finally blossomed into an actual friendship.

So much for that.

Billy laughed. Raw and breathless as it was, the sound rang stark in the still air, startling enough to shock a chorus of nearby insects into sudden silence. Fuck, he was a mess.

A balmy evening breeze wove through the trees, gently rattling branches and kicking up sweet gusts of scent from the scattered wildflowers dotting the grass. Billy shivered and hunched in on himself, grunting at the sharp lance of pain that ricocheted up his arm with the motion.

He was wearing a patterned button-down, washed soft and undone nearly to his navel, with the short sleeves rolled up a few times to show off his biceps. It was a date night shirt, better suited for prowling the boardwalks back in California than sleeping under the stars in the forty-degree Indiana wilderness.

Fuck, what Billy wouldn't give to be back there right now. Neil had never been this bad, in California, but then, he hadn't known for sure back then that Billy was about as queer as a three-dollar bill. At least in California, it wouldn't kill a guy to spend the night sleeping on the beach, most of the year. Might not be the most comfortable experience, but you weren't at risk of losing a finger to frostbite or going hypothermic or what the fuck ever was bound to happen out here.

Billy shivered again. He considered lying down against the Camaro's hood to leech what little heat was still wafting off the engine, but a sharp twinge in his ribs when he started to ease himself back told him that would be a bad idea.

He could always climb back inside and crank the A.C. up, but that was a stop-gap at best. The battery wouldn't last if he ran it all night and, besides, Billy wasn't entirely sure that he wouldn't just fall over if he tried to stand up right now.

He was dying for a fucking cigarette, hands shaking and head pounding like he'd gone ten rounds with something 90 proof the night before. He kept a soft-pack of Marlboros in the pocket of his leather jacket, which he hadn't had the wherewithal to grab, too surprised when Neil yanked him up from the dinner table and started in on him to realize he was better off breaking for the front door—and the coat rack just down the hall from it—than the back. He had a whole carton of cigarettes tucked away in the trunk, but no lighter to speak of, even if he could somehow muster the energy to get up, circle around the back of the car, get the trunk open, and fish a fistful of them free without passing out.

He laughed again, softer but clearer, and shook his head, wincing when it made the pulse in his temples drum even harder.

"I'm gonna fucking die out here," he chuckled into the night, cheeks

aching with the force of his grin. He threw his head back and hollered, "In Hawkins fucking Indiana!" so loud that a couple of birds took off from the nearby trees.

He laughed and laughed and toppled backwards against the Camaro's hood despite the white hot rush of pain that roared through his arm, his head, his ribs. He thought he might be crying, too. His eyes stung and the world had dissolved into blurry smears of color all around him, but he couldn't stop. He was wheezing with it. Positively howling, it was so goddamn funny.

Hawkins fucking Indiana. Christ.

The moon was mostly full, just a sliver of it gone dark and hazy on one side. It spilled brilliant beams of silvery light down through the blackened canopy overhead, fading and flaring as the occasional thin screen of clouds rolled by. The wind ebbed and flowed, ruffling the flora and making the shadows twist and dance.

They started to pick up speed, dark shapes bouncing and rocking in a way that made Billy's stomach lurch, and he realized belatedly that the sudden, energetic shifting was the effect of a set of headlights approaching from behind him. He turned his head and went to raise a hand to shield his eyes on instinct as the mystery vehicle approached, but he used his bad arm and it hurt like hell. Billy whimpered, tucking his arm in tighter against his body, and screwed his eyes shut. The car rolled to a stop a few feet off from the Camaro, engine idling while the faint strains of some Top 40 radio hit cut to an abrupt halt.

Fuck, he thought. As if this night could get any worse.

A locking mechanism clicked and there came a low, metallic creak as a door swung open and then Harrington's voice ricocheted through the clearing, loud and irritated.

"Hey, asshole!"

Billy, who was almost certainly concussed on top of all his other festering injuries and thus not up for their usual exchange of pithy repartee, grunted in response and raised his good hand high enough

to waggle his fingers.

“Your sister called me,” Harrington explained, all tight and waspish.

He probably had his hands stuffed into his pockets, like he always did when he was pissed. Billy could hear his shoes crunching in the gravel as he circled around the front of the Beamer. He didn’t open his eyes. Didn’t want to know what kind of picture King Steve thought he made, sprawled out across the Camaro with his face looking like ground chuck.

“She was all freaked out,” Harrington continued, coming closer, “said you ran out on dinner and asked me if I could come up here and look for you. I thought that was pretty fucking hysterical. Y’know, because you were supposed to meet me at my place like an hour ago? Or did you - ” Harrington stopped with a scuff and sucked a low, sharp breath. He sounded near enough that Billy ought to be able to reach out and touch him without straining, not that he was going to, no matter how tempting it may be.

There was a long, frozen moment of silence, then Harrington breathed, “*Jesus*, Billy. What the fuck happened to you?”

There came a nearly inaudible sussurrrus, fabric shifting over the almost-but-not-quite sound of displaced air, and Billy opened his eyes to find Harrington hovering above him. His eyes were big and dark under his pinched brow, that pretty mouth gone slack with shock.

Billy wanted to shrug, but who knew what barely held together part of him that might knock loose. He settled for licking his teeth and flashing Harrington a weak facsimile of his usual salacious grin.

“Fell down some stairs.”

“You fell down some stairs,” Harrington echoed, eyebrows lifting. His fingers fluttered in the periphery of Billy’s vision, like he wanted to touch but wasn’t sure whether it would be welcome, or where he should start, if it turned out that it was.

Billy, in a moment of insanity or bravery or just plain old desperate stupidity, turned his face. Just a little. Just enough to graze the edge

of Harrington's thumb with his cheek. It dragged against his skin, rough with end of the day stubble and tacky with dried sweat and probably blood.

Harrington breathed out, slow and shaky. He traced the contour of Billy's jaw with a few cautious sweeps of his thumb and then brushed the pads of his fingers over a hot, raw welt just under his eye. Billy bit his lip against a whimper and didn't give a single shit when the pressure of his teeth split the barely formed scab at the center of it back open. It had been a long, long time since anybody touched him with this sort of care, and he was going to bask in it for as long as Harrington was foolish enough to allow.

Harrington pressed his mouth into a thin, angry line and shook his head, catching Billy's gaze and making a point to hold it as he murmured, "Looks like the stairs got more than a few good shots in on you on the way down."

Billy swallowed. His throat hurt, and he could still taste blood on the back of his tongue. He rolled his eyes up and away from Harrington's, squeezing them shut again and licking at his dry lips.

"There was a fight," he admitted. "Before the stairs."

"That why you fell?"

Billy hummed, neither confirmation nor denial, and felt his mouth crack open around a surprised breath when Harrington's fingers shifted down to his lips. Harrington pressed his thumb to the corner of Billy's mouth, tender and almost sweet, and then dragged it down underneath the cushion of his lower lip to glide through the warm trail of blood slipping toward Billy's chin.

"Fuck," Harrington sighed, and then his hands and the comforting heat of him disappeared in another shifting whisper of fabric.

Billy opened his eyes, slow and muzzy like he was stoned, to peer over at Harrington where he had his hip leaned against the Camaro's hood. He had both of his hands shoved into the pockets of his jacket and a look on his face that promised violence, though it didn't seem to be directed at Billy.

“I think you need to go to the hospital,” Harrington said.

Billy snorted, then gasped at the sharp spear of pain it sent through his ribs. “No shit.”

“Will you let me take you?”

“Can’t exactly drive myself.” Billy gestured with his good arm to where his other was braced, stiff and awkward, against his side.

Harrington’s brow furrowed further. His eyes flicked down to Billy’s bum arm and widened with horror.

Shit, Billy realized, as a thunderous expression rolled over Harrington’s handsome features like an incoming storm. Harrington hadn’t noticed the arm.

Harrington’s jaw had gone tight, something dark and vicious seething behind his eyes, which were pinned to the bruise wrapped around the slight, unsettling bend in Billy’s swollen forearm. His shoulders were drawn up, the lean line of his body strung rigid like he was ready to take a swing. If the majority of Billy’s body hadn’t been a big, neon beacon of pain, he might’ve thought it was hot, all of the affront Harrington was feeling on his behalf. As it was, they had more important things to deal with.

Billy held his good arm up, palm open.

“You wanna give me a hand, pretty boy?”

Harrington jumped and flushed, the ruddy tint in his cheeks made visible by the grace of his headlights.

“Yeah,” he said, and clapped his palm into Billy’s own. “Of course, just - ”

He heaved Billy up and Billy went, to the best of his ability, choking back a yelp like a struck dog as every bruised and battered part of him throbbed in protest.

“Fuck, okay,” Harrington murmured, while Billy shakily unfolded his legs from where his heels were balanced on the fender and extended

them down into the dirt. Harrington slung his other arm around Billy's waist for support and guided him into a woozy lean, taking the brunt of Billy's weight against his side.

"All right," Harrington soothed, matching Billy step for wobbling step as they crossed the few paltry feet to the passenger side of his BMW. "That's it. You're doing great."

"Harrington?" Billy asked through his teeth.

"Hm?"

"Shut up."

Harrington huffed a soft laugh and Billy allowed himself a moment to preen at this minor victory even as the next hurdle loomed before them.

Billy let Harrington shuffle them around until Billy could lean back against the Beamer. Harrington pinned him there with a gentle hand on his shoulder and reached over to tug the door open, then guided Billy in, hovering and biting his lip until Billy had collapsed back into the seat with a choked off gasp.

"Okay," Harrington said, still frowning. "You okay?"

Billy gritted his teeth and wrapped his good arm tight around his abdomen. "Fuckin' peachy, pretty boy."

"Okay," Harrington said again, sounding honestly relieved to hear Billy giving him shit. "I'm just gonna - " He gestured vaguely toward the other side of the car, added, "Yeah," and then closed the door.

Billy let his head flop back against the butter soft leather of Harrington's yuppie sedan and closed his eyes and focused on breathing. He didn't feel so good, anymore, now that all of the adrenaline in his system had dissolved back from whence it came. There was a clammy sheen of sweat coating his skin and he could feel himself shaking everywhere, these tiny little tremors he couldn't control.

The car rocked when Harrington climbed in, just barely jostling Billy,

and he whimpered before he could help himself, cutting Harrington a narrow, watery-eyed glare.

“Sorry,” Harrington murmured, low and soothing. He reached a hand over and brushed his fingers over Billy’s knee then yanked it back like he’d accidentally touched a stove burner. “Sorry,” he said again, around a bitter little breath a step off from a laugh, and shook his head. “Okay.” He put his arm up behind Billy’s seat and craned around to peer out the back windshield.

“Here we go,” Harrington announced, as they rolled slowly back toward the street. He cut Billy a quick, reassuring look and a patented Steve Harrington smirk, all sly under his big doe eyes.

Christ, he was fucking beautiful.

Billy might have been more concussed than he thought.

“Gonna have you all fixed up in no time, Hargrove,” Harrington promised. It was stupid, because there was no fixing what was wrong with Billy, but damned if he didn’t believe Harrington when he said it.

Couldn’t let Harrington know that of course. If Billy’d had the energy to flip him off, he would have. He settled for closing his eyes again and muttering, “Shut up and lay down the lead foot, princess. I don’t got all night.”

He smiled, small and close-mouthed, when Harrington laughed, and let the rhythm of the road and the soft sound of Harrington humming off-key snatches of some dweeby pop tune under his breath lull him into a hazy, not-quite doze. Every once in a while, there would come a gentle brush of warmth where Harrington nudged his fingers against Billy’s knee, thoughtless and familiar, like he wasn’t even aware he’d done it. If Billy sighed and slouched down and spread his legs just a little wider to encourage the contact, he didn’t see how that was anybody’s business but his own.

Hawkins fucking Indiana, Billy thought again, safely ensconced in Harrington’s ostentatious ride, with his heat and his voice and the faint spice of his cologne in the air between them, while the golden

wash of the passing streetlamps flooded into the cab and back out again.

Maybe it wasn't all bad.

Author's Note:

Thanks for reading!